

The founders of the association for the study of nationalities: the case of Stepan Horak (1920–1986) and the Shevchenko Scientific Society, USA

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The present article critically evaluates the contribution of the Shevchenko Scientific Society, USA, and the founder of the Association for the Study of Nationalities (ASN), Stepan Horak, to the genesis and development of the ASN.

Keywords: Stepan Horak; Shevchenko Scientific Society, USA; Association for the Study of Nationalities; *Nationalities Papers*

The focus of this brief paper is the respective roles of the Shevchenko Scientific Society, USA, and Stepan Horak in the founding of the Association for the Study of Nationalities and the establishment of the journal *Nationalities Papers*. The sources of my presentation are threefold: Ukrainian encyclopedias¹, from which I have culled biographical information on Horak, the archives of the Shevchenko Scientific Society in New York, especially minutes of various meetings in which he participated², and my personal memoirs of the man with whom I had many discussions, at times quite heated ones.

Stepan Horak was born in the town of Horodok, Western Ukraine, on October 23, 1920; he died in Charleston, Illinois, on December 20, 1986. He received his secondary education in Lviv, Ukraine, and, having emigrated to Germany during WWII, he studied at the University of Erlangen, where he obtained a doctorate in history in 1949, and later he supplemented his studies at the Universities of Bonn (1952) and Tübingen (1953–56).

Horak emigrated to the USA rather late – 1957. The bulk of the so-called Third Wave of Ukrainian emigration came to this country in the late 1940s and early 1950s. As with most of his fellow Ukrainian academics, Horak did manage to establish himself professionally in the USA, at first as a librarian, having obtained an MA degree in Library Sciences from the University of Michigan (1960) and later as professor of Russian and Eastern European history at Eastern Illinois University, where, in 1987, a scholarship was established in his name for upper division students whose concentration includes credits in East European history. Among his principal publications are book-length studies and articles written in Ukrainian, German and English on twentieth-century Ukrainian history and politics, the growth of Communism in Russia, on Poland and her national minorities, and on Soviet historiography.

The name of Stepan Horak begins to appear rather regularly in the minutes of the meetings of the Shevchenko Scientific Society, USA, after 1970. As with most Ukrainian scholars of his generation, Horak joined the Society because it was considered (and still is)

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the oldest (and thus the most prestigious) Ukrainian Academy of Arts and Sciences, i.e., the fame and popularity of which in the Ukrainian community in the United States, enabled it to maintain a professional level of scholarship as well as a leading position in Ukrainian-American civic affairs. It was generally considered a matter of prestige and personal success to attain the status of “dijsnyj chlen” (real, or full, member) of the Society, and the great majority of Ukrainian émigré scholars in the United States belonged to it. It was, after all, the society of Ukraine’s most eminent man of letters, Ivan Franko, of the country’s premier historian, Mykhailo Hrushevs’kyi, and of the renowned folklorist, Volodymyr Hnatiuk. It was also a society which boasted of having as its full members Albert Einstein and Max Planck before they attained world fame; and last and not least, it was (and still is) a society that had a sound financial base and enjoyed the generous support of the Ukrainian community like no other organization of its kind. Who would not want to belong to it? Horak was no exception. In addition, he was a very ambitious man and, to be sure, a visionary. He saw the Shevchenko Scientific Society as a most propitious forum to spread his ideas within the Ukrainian scholarly community and beyond it. In my opinion, the two basic notions which animated his thinking at that time were the need for Ukrainian scholarship in the United States to become a more integral part of the mainstream of American academic life, and, conversely, the need for American scholarship to broaden its parameters and to devote more attention to the less frequently studied cultures, especially those in Eastern Europe. Horak often voiced (rather vociferously and stridently), his opinion that Slavic studies in the United States were too russocentric and that not enough attention was being paid to other nationalities and to minorities. He attempted to ameliorate the situation as attested by his *A Bibliographic Guide to the Study of the Soviet Nationalities: Non-Russian Peoples of the USSR* (1982) and of course, by founding the Association for the Study of Nationalities and its journal, *Nationalities Papers*, which remains his greatest achievement. These two ideas of his were shared by most, if not all, members of the Shevchenko Scientific Society, and his influence within it increased almost exponentially. On September 30, 1972, he was elected director of the Society’s newly created “Section on the History of Ukraine,” thus becoming a member of the Executive Board, and he immediately developed a plan of activities for the entire Society. While using his new position, Horak began to act as a quasi-foreign minister for the Society – he planned and organized sessions on behalf of the Society at various conventions (such as AAASS, ATSEEL) in the United States and international congresses in Europe. Often he would get carried away and do and say things that earned him criticism even from such a gentle and soft-spoken man as the late Volodymyr Stojko. Horak would, as a rule, embellish the reports of his activities, incorporating in them information which, strictly speaking, had nothing to do with the Society. I remember, his style prompted me once, while reporting on my activities, to say, “I am going to pull a Horak now, and share with you some of my achievements that have absolutely nothing to do with our Society’s work.” However, lest I create a false impression, Stepan Horak was a hard-working, dynamic, no-nonsense person who loved his calling. As an example, I quote the minutes of the Shevchenko Scientific Society Board Meeting of December 12, 1981:

“Prof. S. Horak reports on the session within the AAASS convention held in Monterey and sponsored by the Shevchenko Scientific Society, about the publication of the *Nationalities Papers* for the fall of 1981, about the preparations for the Society’s session at the AAASS convention in Washington, DC in the fall of 82, about the reception of a grant in the sum of \$34,000 for his study ‘The National Minorities in the Countries of Eastern Europe,’ about the preparation of the Shevchenko Society session at the AATSEEL

convention in New York, and about the Ukrainian-Belorussian conference in 1982 (see attachment)."

There is no question, the man was a workaholic, and he did many good things. However, all-too-often he would do it completely on his own, without prior consultation with his fellow officers, and what is worse, he would assume financial obligations on behalf of the Society, and present them as a *fait accompli* demanding funds for ventures that had no prior approval. He became a sort of *enfant terrible* of the Shevchenko Scientific Society. In the minutes of the Executive Board meeting of October 27, 1983, for example, we read how Horak engaged a number of scholars to attend a Congress of Historians in Stuttgart, Germany, without any prior consultation with the Board.

This, I hasten to add, was not the case insofar as Association for the Study of Nationalities is concerned. The Shevchenko Society always supported it. The already referred to Minutes of December 12, 1981, record Horak's motion to assign an additional sum of 250 dollars for the purchase of 50 additional copies of *Nationalities Papers*. The motion was passed unanimously. It is also recorded that during the same meeting, another one of his motions was not passed, which "provoked great dissatisfaction on the part of Prof. Horak." (These minutes were recorded by the eminent Ukrainian journalist, Olha Kuzmovych, who passed away on the 7th of March, 2012).

However, not everything always went smoothly with the Society's support of the ASN. In one of his annual reports, the then President of the Shevchenko Scientific Society, Jaroslav Padoch (1908–98), made the following statement about *Nationalities Papers*:

"This biannual publication has the support of the Shevchenko Scientific Society, which is its cosponsor. We have an agreement that every number will contain a list of our activities and publications. The publisher does not adhere to this agreement. In addition, we were expecting the journal to record and review our new publications. This is not happening. I am posing the question, what shall we do next? After all, we expend \$1000.00 on each issue."

To sum up: The Father of the Association for the Study of Nationalities was Stepan Horak; its Godfather was the Shevchenko Scientific Society, USA. About the latter, nothing additional needs to be said here. The Society enjoys an excellent reputation in the world of scholarship. The former, on the other hand, deserves to be better known, and I am grateful for the opportunity to share with you my memories of him. As, I believe, my comments already suggest, Stepan Horak was a rather controversial individual. In our discussions on the nature of scholarship and the role of the Shevchenko Scientific Society in the United States, he often came across as a *Besserwisser*; some people even referred to him as an academic conman. He was very didactic – not to say demagogic – in the presenting of his ideas, at times cantankerous and irascible, and to be sure, relentlessly anticlerical, which did not endear him to the rather conservative members of the Shevchenko Scientific Society. On the other hand, I think these few lines manage to convey the indisputable fact that he was an energetic, tireless worker who believed that mission of scholarship was always to seek the truth and to afford all people an equal opportunity to find their place in life. I believe the Association for the Study of Nationalities and its work is truly a fitting monument to the man whose life and vision we are honoring here today.

Notes

1. See *Encyclopedia of Ukraine* vol. II, edited by Volodymyr Kubijovyč. Toronto: U of Toronto Press, 1988. p. 218; and *Entsyclopediya Ukrayinskoyi Diyaspory* vol. I knyha I, edited by

Vasyl Markus' and Daria Markus'. New York and Chicago: Shevchenko Scientific Society, USA, 2009. p. 173.

2. The archives are housed at the headquarters of the Shevchenko Scientific Society, USA, located at 63 4th Avenue, New York, NY.

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